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ABSTRACT

The District of Columbia has a gaping chasm separating public schools for blacks and whites; in one political jurisdiction there are two "cities" separated by family income. Each "city" has its own set of schools. One set serves 77 percent of the total elementary school population and 80 percent of the African American elementary school students in the district. These schools are in neighborhoods where test scores tend to be uniformly below the national norms and, in several instances, drastically below the norm. There are 90 schools in this category, representing 73 percent of all elementary schools. The other set of schools serves 23 percent of the elementary school population, and are in more affluent neighborhoods where test scores generally are above national norms. The overwhelming majority of African Americans enrolled in this set attend only 22 of the 37 schools in this category. At the 11 schools where there is consistently high performance, only 1 percent of the entire African American elementary school population is enrolled, compared to 74 percent of the white population. Few African Americans in the District have even a remote hope of being educated in healthy learning environments. When conditions in nearby schools are below the norm they set the tenor for the entire zip code community. The tragedy of District of Columbia public schools serving African Americans is compounded by the managers of the educational system, who anesthetize the public by issuing reassuring but misleading data. Recommendations are offered. Data are presented on three tables and figures. A list of seven references is included. (BJV)

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1313 North Capitol Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20002
(202) 745-0500

Research Notes
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A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Test Scores, Neighborhoods and Family Income in D.C. Public Schools

The Nation's capital has a gaping chasm separating public schools for Blacks and Whites – two different academic worlds in one political jurisdiction, two "cities" separated by family income.

On one side, there is a set of schools which serves 77 percent of the total elementary school population and 80 percent of the African-American elementary school students in the District. These students attend schools in neighborhoods where test scores tend to be uniformly below national norms and, in several instances, drastically below the norm. There are 90 schools in this category, representing 73 percent of all elementary schools.

Another set of schools serves 23 percent of the elementary school population. These students, who are from more affluent families, attend schools in neighborhoods where test scores generally are above national norms. However, African Americans are still at the lower rungs of this higher ladder. The overwhelming majority of them are enrolled in 22 of the 37 schools in this category.

At the 11 schools where there is consistently high performance, only 1 percent of the entire African-American elementary school population is enrolled, compared to 74 percent of the White population. This means that most African Americans in the District do not have even a remote hope that they can be educated in environments where substantial learning is taking place.

While the test scores used for this study measure individual achievement, their collective impact cannot be ignored. They strongly indicate that individual achievement is constrained by the achievement of the group. When conditions in nearby schools are below the norm, they set the tenor for achievement in the entire zip code community.

Taking a closer look at schools within zip codes (Table 2), it is true that each of the Category I zip codes has some schools that are above the norm on two or more indicators, but the weight of the others brings down the neighborhood average.

In Category II schools, there are again two groups separated by family income. At the lower end of the economic scale, 36 percent of the 22 schools are below the norm. Of the eight schools for which data are avail-

Table 1

PERCENTILE RANK, VARIANCE FROM NORM, AND ENROLLMENT IN D.C. PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, BY ZIP CODE AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS
(Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form U)

I: ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS BELOW NORM ON TWO OR MORE INDICATORS
(Reading, Mathematics, Language and Science)

		ECONOMIC INDICATORS		MEDIAN PERCENTILE RANK AND VARIANCE FROM NATIONAL NORM								ELEMENTARY ENROLLMENT				
		Median	Median	READ		MATH		LANG		SCIENCE						
Zip Code	No. of Schools	Family Income	Home Value	PR	Var	PR	Var	PR	Var	PR	Var	AfAm	White	Hispan	Other	Total
20005	2	$15,008	$122,222	37	-13	52	2	45	-5	35	-15	335	19	200	124	678
20001	9	$15,329	$ 62,980	46	-4	57	7	42	-8	32	-18	3,118	1	49	18	3186
20010	3	$18,611	$ 74,694	40	-10	53	3	45	-5	43	-7	1,380	16	438	30	1864
20009	6	$18,857	$110,275	40	-10	53	3	46	-4	36	-14	1,853	21	564	17	2455
20019	21	$19,180	$ 56,169	47	-3	61	11	54	4	45	-5	8,588	4	4	10	8606
20032	12	$19,357	$ 58,125	46	-4	62	12	49	-1	43	-7	6,985	302	48	69	7404
20020	13	$20,431	$ 66,052	46	-4	56	6	49	-1	36	-14	6,259	11	25	29	6324
20002	14	$20,482	$ 66,433	44	-6	57	7	53	3	48	-2	5,263	26	14	16	5319
20018	4	$26,036	$ 70,239	45	-5	53	3	50	0	45	-5	1,582	1	5	7	1595
20003	6	$26,152	$108,589	44	-6	61	11	43	-7	34	-16	2,003	145	21	7	2176
MEAN		$ 19,944	$ 79,578													
SUBTOT	90											37,366	546	1,368	327	39,607
PERCENT	73											80	24	65	61	77

II: ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ABOVE NORM ON MOST INDICATORS

		ECONOMIC INDICATORS		MEDIAN PERCENTILE RANK AND VARIANCE FROM NATIONAL NORM								ELEMENTARY ENROLLMENT				
		Median	Median	READ		MATH		LANG		SCIENCE						
Zip Code	No. of Schools	Family Income	Home Value	PR	Var	PR	Var	PR	Var	PR	Var	AfAm	White	Hispan	Other	Total
20036	1	$23,233	$161,538	52	2	80	30	74	24	63	13	283	5	31	8	327
20011	12	$26,536	$ 72,808	52	2	65	15	58	8	59	9	4,681	19	199	35	4934
20017	4	$26,747	$ 71,201	51	1	67	17	58	8	51	1	1,672	5	11	11	1699
20024	3	$29,167	$110,256	51	1	59	9	58	8	41	-9	993	12	15	14	1034
20008*	3	$33,148	$200,100	73	23	88	38	81	31	78	28	199	372	227	52	850
20007*	3	$34,650	$200,100	89	39	98	48	79	29	82	32	152	260	90	13	515
20012	2	$35,609	$112,443	56	6	71	21	62	12	59	9	923	22	16	11	952
20016*	3	$40,203	$177,196	80	30	90	40	86	36	84	34	165	480	139	41	825
20015*	2	$46,583	$157,443	88	38	95	45	89	39	91	41	89	532	19	23	663
MEAN		$32,875	$140,343													
SUBTOT	33											9,157	1,687	747	208	11,799
PERCENT	27											20	76	35	39	23
TOTAL	123											46,523	2,233	2,115	535	51,406
PERCENT	100											100	100	100	100	100
*SPECIAL NOTE, CATEGORY II: Percent of students in areas with four HIGHEST percentile ranks												1	74	22	24	

able at the higher end of the scale (Zip Codes 7, 8, 15 and 16), none are below the norm.

The tragedy of D.C. public schools serving African Americans is compounded by those who are the managers of the educational system. These professionals have anesthetized the public by issuing reassuring data.

For example, Figure 1 contains one of the charts which accompany the official test scores for the District. It shows that 75 percent of the

schools are at or above the norm in mathematics, and language is not far behind. However, reading, which really is applied language, is quite low. Science, which utilizes applied mathematics, is lower still and is not even shown in the graph.

This type of optimism lulls taxpayers and parents into the belief that conditions will get better before their children are too old to go to school. It is designed to convince restless taxpayers that a popular revolt is unwarranted.

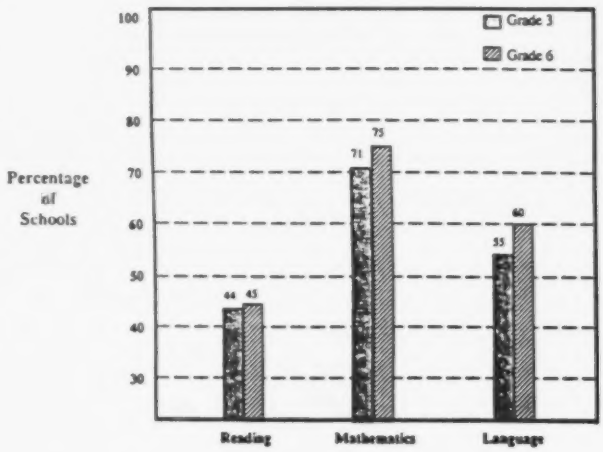
Principals and teachers, perhaps unwittingly, also contribute to this deception. Occasional media articles show a principal or parent speaking in glowing terms about achievement and progress in D.C. schools. This may be true of one group of students at one particular time, but the overall picture is the opposite.

On the other hand, some parents have been more aggressive in defending the mediocrity of D.C. schools. When a local newspaper dared to publish a series of critical articles, parents began to attack the media instead of those who were responsible for creating the conditions that existed (Fisher, 1987). It should be noted that these were parents at a high school in Zip Code 2, whose school had percentile ranks from 11 to 23 points below the norm on multiple indicators.

Figure 1

OPTIMISTIC GRAPH DISTRIBUTED BY D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITH 1987-88 CTBS TEST SCORES

Percentage of Schools Achieving At or Above
The National Norm
Median Grade Equivalent Score of 3.8 for Grade 3
and 6.8 for Grade 6
The Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills, Form U
May 1988



Local elected officials contribute to the problem, too. A remark by one member of the D.C. school board, representing the city's predominantly White and most affluent zip codes, demonstrates the pervasive racism that keeps alive the District's two academic cities.

When asked about spending more money on the city's only selective public school, where 95 percent of the students are African Americans, she said, "[W]e are not in the business of creating private public schools. If you want a purely academic experience for your kids, go to a nice little house in the suburbs" (Fisher, 1988).

The scenario described here for the District of Columbia is similar to conditions that affect African Americans in other urban areas across the country (Knight, 1987). A study by Orfield and Hartman in Chicago indicates that

feelings of comfort and security apparently have filtered down to the students themselves (Franczyk, 1988). Students in urban schools "not only are unaware of the inadequacies but believe that their schools are functioning well."

In another study, Stevenson, Chen and Uttal point out that "minority children rated themselves as faring better [in reading and mathematics than their white counterparts], in fact, than they really were" (Viadero, 1989).

The Quality Assurance staff at the D.C. Public Schools, who publish the test data, are correct in pointing out that the effectiveness of a school should not be measured by test scores alone. The other factors they cite are "average class size, pupil mobility, and socioeconomic base of the school population, to mention a few."

This study, *A Tale of Two Cities*, begins to explore some of these other dimensions. Our goal is to make it possible for educators, policymakers, parents and others to engage in a comprehensive evaluation of D.C. schools, especially as they affect African Americans.

Solutions

Remedies being implemented elsewhere may not necessarily work in the District of Columbia. Parents and other taxpayers may need to develop their own local solutions.

One remedy that has been presented in the past is the forced busing of Blacks to schools with predominantly White enrollment. Another is the voluntary busing of Whites to so-called "magnet schools" that have superior instructional resources and usually are located in predominantly African-American communities. Even assuming for the sake of argument that the underlying premises of busing are correct – and we do not agree that they are – the data show that busing never could be an appropriate remedy for the District of Columbia. There simply are not enough "good" schools to which Blacks can be transported, and there are not enough Whites to spread around so that they can make a difference anywhere.

Another remedy gaining in popularity across the country is "choice." Choice plans allow parents to choose the schools their children will attend, and tax dollars follow the child. The assumption is that increasing competition for funds will force schools to improve in order to maintain their constituency and financial support.

However, the data in this study show that, for the moment at least, choice is a useless remedy in the District. For the most part, parents will be able to choose only from among schools with equally negative learning environments, even though a few of the schools with higher scores are known to have some vacancies and could accommodate children from other neighborhoods.

There is much discussion about other school reforms also, both nationally and in D.C., but reforms that are manufactured in a vacuum, without an economic component, are a farce. Policymakers may find, instead, that they must reach into each neighborhood and improve economic conditions at the local level before classroom reforms can be effective.

For example, it may be necessary to create "learning zones" and offer economic incentives for neighborhoods that improve their schools, including tax advantages for parents, teachers and businesses who contribute to an improved learning environment in selected communities.

One of the positive things that parents can do is to organize themselves in their own zip code communities to solve the problem on a local level. They should appoint study teams to discover the secrets of success for schools in their neighborhood that exceed the norms.

For example, is it a matter of teaching styles? Is the program at each grade level appropriate for the developmental level of the children? Is it teacher competence? Is there a lack of resources or are available resources improperly used by the teachers? Is it school management? Is there an active PTA?

Parents have been convinced that they have limited skills and, instead of using their own common sense, often rely excessively on experts and consultants who feed voraciously on problems of what they love to call "the disadvantaged." Parents also give too much deference to professionals who are elected or paid to manage educational systems. This can be counterproductive.

Parents should make a concentrated effort to become better informed about the realm of the possible in academic achievement, become aware of what they are missing, be less defensive about protecting mediocrity, discover who else besides themselves may be keeping their children from excellence, rely more on their own judgment, and turn their leaders into followers.

The Institute for Independent Education is concerned about the condition of education in the District of Columbia and in similar cities across the United States. We are reminded of the words of Henry Highland Garnett, a 19th century African-American leader, who said:

> **"In every man's mind the good seeds of liberty are planted, and he who brings his fellow down so low, as to make him contented with a condition of slavery, commits the highest crime against God and man."**

Method

This analysis was made from the median national percentile rank of each school in reading, language, mathematics and science. All percentile ranks are for Grade 6, tested in May of the 1987-1988 school year.

It establishes the mean for schools grouped according to zip codes, because this permits much finer distinctions than are possible when schools are grouped by school regions or by city wards. The zip code is the smallest group for which median family income and median home value are readily available and relatively inexpensive to gather.

Elementary schools were chosen because they are a stable indicator of family distribution in the District. Most families do not transport elementary age children across zip codes, as is common at the high school level.

Enrollment is shown for elementary schools, from Prekindergarten to Grade 6. However, the data include nine schools that are primarily elementary schools but have some students in Grades 7 and 8, and two schools that are primarily middle schools but also have students in Grades 5 and 6.

Definitions

PERCENTILE RANK (PR) refers to a position in a group...For example, if a pupil receives a percentile rank of 70, this means that the student scored higher than approximately 70 percent of the students in the norm group.

The **MEDIAN NATIONAL PERCENTILE RANK** for all grades and subtests is 50. For example, if a school's median percentile rank is 45, it indicates that the schools has scored 5 percentile points below the national norm.

NATIONAL NORMS...obtained from students nationwide...describe the average or typical performance of students in general and should not be regarded as ideal standards.

(From D.C. Public Schools, CTBS Test Scores, 1987-1988)

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Appendix

Table 2
Median Percentile Ranks of Schools, by Zip Code
(District of Columbia CTBS Test Scores, 1987-1988

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS Name of School	ZIP	Percentile Rankings for Grade 6 READ	MATH	LANG	SCIENCE
BRUCE-MONROE	1	59	42	33	23
CLEVELAND	1	42	43	39	32
COOK	1	NOT AVAILABLE			
GAGE ECKINGTON	1	36	57	39	38
LEWIS	1	52	58	46	25
MONTGOMERY	1	52	70	64	52
SEATON	1	61	81	59	42
SLATER	1	35	42	31	16
WALKER-JONES	1	32	59	26	31
MEAN - ZIP 1		46	57	42	32
VARIANCE FROM NATIONAL NORM		-4	7	-8	-18
BLOW	2	24	32	36	22
EMERY	2	35	51	41	29
GIBBS	2	24	44	35	26
GODING	2	56	75	68	66
KINGSMAN	2	33	43	42	52
LUDLOW TAYLOR	2	34	44	50	29
MAURY	2	39	53	47	38
MINER	2	91	97	98	87
SHAED	2	43	49	50	47
STUART-HOBSON	2	68	75	74	71
WEBB	2	38	48	42	42
WHEATLEY	2	63	88	63	79
WILSON, JO	2	27	45	44	33
YOUNG	2	35	49	47	55
MEAN - ZIP 2		44	57	53	48
VARIANCE		-6	7	3	-2
BRENT	3	54	63	65	51
BRYAN	3	41	67	68	39
GIDDINGS	3	47	82	23	21
PAYNE	3	54	68	48	50
TYLER	3	29	24	20	10
VAN NESS	3	37	59	33	34
MEAN - ZIP 3		44	61	43	34
VARIANCE		-6	11	-7	-16
ADAMS	5	36	49	37	43
THOMSON	5	38	55	53	26
MEAN - ZIP 5		37	52	45	35
VARIANCE		-13	2	-5	-15
HARDY	7	89	98	79	82
HYDE	7	NOT AVAILABLE			
STODDERT	7	NOT AVAILABLE			
VARIANCE - ZIP 7		39	48	29	32
HEARST	8	62	73	68	83
MURCH	8	89	95	87	83
OYSTER	8	68	95	88	67
MEAN - ZIP 8		73	88	81	78
VARIANCE		23	38	31	28

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS Name of School	ZIP	Percentile Rankings for Grade 6 READ	MATH	LANG	SCIENCE
COOKE, HD	9	36	58	47	32
GARRISON	9	42	56	38	24
HARRISON	9	30	56	41	40
MEYER	9	54	62	51	54
REED, MARIE	9	32	40	40	31
ROSS	9	46	43	56	34
MEAN - ZIP 9		40	53	46	36
VARIANCE		-10	3	-4	-14
BANCROFT	10	43	54	52	36
PARK VIEW	10	36	42	38	34
RAYMOND	10	41	63	46	59
MEAN - ZIP 10		40	53	45	43
VARIANCE		-10	3	-5	-7
BARNARD	11	44	59	52	51
BRIGHTWOOD	11	43	62	47	43
CLARK	11	44	79	55	59
KEENE	11	60	70	61	64
LA SALLE	11	62	78	81	60
PETWORTH	11	32	50	42	45
POWELL	11	79	77	65	66
RUDOLPH	11	51	57	69	62
TRUESDELL	11	65	72	67	57
TUBMAN	11	34	45	40	30
WEST	11	43	49	49	84
WHITTIER	11	63	82	65	87
MEAN - ZIP 11		52	65	58	59
VARIANCE		2	15	8	9
SHEPHERD	12	65	79	73	59
TAKOMA	12	47	62	51	58
MEAN - ZIP 12		56	71	62	59
VARIANCE		6	21	12	9
LAFAYETTE	15	89	94	89	93
MANN	15	86	95	88	89
MEAN - ZIP 15		88	95	89	91
VARIANCE		38	45	39	41
EATON	16	71	86	78	76
JANNEY	16	89	93	93	92
KEY	16	NOT AVAILABLE			
MEAN - ZIP 16		80	90	86	84
VARIANCE		30	40	36	34
BROOKLAND	17	37	61	44	41
BUNKER-HILL	17	63	68	70	54
NOYES	17	36	66	50	44
SLOWE	17	67	73	66	65
MEAN - ZIP 17		51	67	58	51
VARIANCE		1	17	8	1

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS Name of School	ZIP	Percentile Rankings for Grade 6 READ	MATH	LANG	SCIENCE
AITON	19	30	68	42	46
BENNING	19	51	75	55	28
BURRVILLE	19	61	75	63	59
CARVER	19	50	56	54	48
DAVIS	19	31	39	43	32
DREW	19	29	43	37	32
FLETCHER JOHNSON	19	26	51	28	22
HARRIS	19	54	72	60	60
HOUSTON	19	66	62	67	30
KENILWORTH	19	61	65	73	60
KIMBALL	19	43	62	61	45
MERRITT	19	55	54	60	82
MINER	19	91	97	98	87
NALLE	19	32	53	35	30
PLUMMER	19	29	59	38	23
RICHARDSON	19	36	55	40	29
RIVER TERRACE	19	49	44	60	53
SHADD	19	45	41	50	38
SMOTHERS	19	63	75	68	64
THOMAS	19	58	84	60	55
WEATHERLESS	19	34	48	40	30
MEAN - ZIP 19		47	61	54	45
VARIANCE		-3	11	4	-5
BEERS	20	39	35	40	37
BIRNEY	20	45	52	40	26
GARFIELD	20	43	55	44	25
KETCHAM	20	34	51	36	27
MOTEN	20	42	61	49	44
NICHOLS	20	NOT AVAILABLE			
ORR	20	54	67	59	38
				Continued...	

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS Name of School	ZIP	Percentile Rankings for Grade 6 READ	MATH	LANG	SCIENCE
RANDLE HIGHLANDS	20	43	61	45	42
SAVOY	20	41	57	57	36
STANTON	20	52	70	62	47
TURNER	20	46	59	49	37
WILKINSON	20	NOT AVAILABLE			
WINSTON	20	63	53	60	34
MEAN - ZIP 20		46	56	49	36
VARIANCE		-4	6	-1	-14
AMIDON	24	67	79	76	58
BOWEN	24	63	70	64	46
SYPHAX	24	24	29	34	19
MEAN - ZIP 24		51	59	58	41
VARIANCE		1	9	8	-9
DRAPER	32	55	71	43	53
FRIENDSHIP	32	38	51	40	28
GREEN	32	35	69	54	36
HENDLEY	32	35	43	31	23
KING, ML	32	38	55	51	29
LECKIE	32	48	71	54	55
MALCOLM X	32	23	48	41	25
MC GOGNEY	32	59	71	66	50
PATTERSON	32	57	63	58	74
SIMON	32	63	71	52	50
TERRELL, MC	32	40	67	51	45
WASH HIGHLAND	32	56	68	50	52
MEAN - ZIP 32		46	62	49	43
VARIANCE		-4	12	-1	-7
STEVENS	36	52	80	74	63
VARIANCE		2	30	24	13

Summary of Table 2
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS BELOW NORM
(Schools for Which Data are Available)

Zip Code	Below Norm	Total Schools
20005	1	2
20001	5	8
20010	1	3
20009	5	6
20019	10	21
20032	3	12
20020	7	11
20002	10	14
20018	3	4
20003	3	6
Total	48	87
Percent	55	100

Zip Code	Below Norm	Total Schools
20036	0	1
20011	4	12
20017	2	4
20024	1	3
20008*	0	3
20007*	0	1
20012	1	2
20016*	0	2
20015*	0	2
Total	8	30
Percent	27	100

*Top ranking zip codes.